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PHNOM PENH LEADERS PREPARE DRAFT PROPOSAL TO SIHANOUK

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(BY JEAN-JACQUES CAZAUX)

(TEXT) PHNOM PENH, APRIL 16 (AFP)--REPUBLICAN LEADERS HERE ARE NOW READY TO ACCEPT THAT A RAPID AND ORDERLY TRANSFER OF POWER TAKES PLACE SO AS TO AVOID THE LOSS OF FURTHER LIVES, HIGHLY RELIABLE SOURCES SAID HERE TODAY.

THEY WERE SPEAKING AS THE MILITARY SITUATION DETERIORATED SHARPLY. THE REPUBLICAN RADIO ANNOUNCED THAT THE RED KHMERS HAD CAPTURED THE CONTROL TOWER AT POCHENTONG AIRPORT.

THE RED KHMERS HAD BROKEN THROUGH IN THE SOUTH FORCING ACROSS THE BESSAC RIVER TO ONLY A FEW HUNDRED METERS (YARDS) OF THE CITY LIMITS.

THE PHNOM PENH LEADERS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS HEADED BY THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARED THE PHNOM HOTEL A NEUTRAL SANCTUARY ZONE.

THIS SUDDEN DETERIORATION OF THE SITUATION ON ALL THE FRONTS AROUND THE CAPITAL AND THE RISING TIDE OF PANICKING REFUGEES DID AWAY WITH THE LAST DOUBTS OF THE LEADERS.

THE SOURCES SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS DETERMINED TO ACCEPT ANY SOLUTION WHICH WILL RAPIDLY END THE FIGHTING.

CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT MEMBERS CONTINUED LATE INTO THE NIGHT AT THE HOME OF LONG BORET, THE PREMIER. AS THEY TALKED BLAZING FUEL DUMPS LIT THE NIGHT INTO DAY.

THE DISCUSSIONS ENDED WITH THE DRAWING UP OF A FIRST DRAFT PROPOSAL FOR SUBMISSION TO THE HEAD OF THE CAMBODIAN ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNION (RGNU) PRINCE NORODOM SIHANOUK.

IT WAS ADDRESSED ALSO TO THE LEADERS OF THE UNITED NATIONAL FRONT OF CAMBODIA (NUFC) AND TO THE COMMANDER OF THE PEOPLE'S ARMED FORCES OF CAMBODIAN NATIONAL LIBERATION.

EARLY TODAY THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF THE REPUBLIC HEADED BY GENERAL SAK SUTHSAKAN MET IN ITS TURN TO ENDORSE THE FINAL TEXT OF THE PROPOSAL.

THIS, IF IT DOES NOT AT ANY TIME MENTION UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER, IS NEVERTHELESS VERY REALISTIC CONCERNING THE PRESENT SITUATION IN PHNOM PENH AND THE FUTURE OF THE "REPUBLIC".

MEANWHILE FUEL TANKS BLAZED AFTER RED KHMER GUNNERS HIT THE TANKS SIX KILOMETERS (3.5 MILES) TO THE NORTH AND THE OTHER IN THE SOUTH NEAR THE BITTERLY CONTESTED UNITED NATIONS BRIDGE.

MR LONG BORET, SPEAKING WITH AGENCE FRANCE PRESS LAST NIGHT DESCRIBED THE SITUATION OF THE REPUBLICAN REGIME AS "EXTREMELY CRITICAL". HE STRESSED THE VERY PRECARIOUS MILITARY POSITION AFTER GOVERNMENT TROOPS ABANDONED ALL THE LEFT BANK OF THE BASSAC RIVER, THE INDUSTRIAL SUBURB OF TAKMAU, 10 KILOMETERS (SEVEN MILES) SOUTH AND PHNOM BASSET 25 KILOMETERS (17 MILES) NORTHWEST OF HERE.

ROAD BLOCKS AROUND THE CAPITAL WERE REINFORCED TO CHECK THE FLOW OF REFUGEES WHO ARE CAUSING PANIC AMONG THE CAPITAL'S POPULATION AND GOVERNMENT TROOPS ASSIGNED TO THE SHRINKING DEFENCE PERIMETER.

LAST NIGHT TORN BODIES WERE BROUGHT BY BARGE UP THE MEKONG AND BASSAC RIVERS. THE CORPSES FILLED WHOLE VESSELS WHICH WERE UNLOADED IN THE NORTHERN PART OF THE CAPITAL. THE DEAD WERE THE LAST DEFENDERS OF THE NARROW TONGUE OF LAND WHICH LIES BETWEEN THE MEKONG AND BASSAC RIVERS SOUTH OF THE UNITED NATIONS BRIDGE.

A GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN RIGHTLY DENIED THE FALL OF THE TUOL KORK SUBU

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A GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN RIGHTLY DENIED THE FALL OF THE TUOL KORK SUBURB WHERE A SANDAL FACTORY WAS SET ABLAZE YESTERDAY BY 105 MM ROCKETS.

IT WAS SUCH RUMOURS SWEEPING THE CAPITAL THAT HELPED CAUSE PANIC AMONG THE REMAINING AMERICAN JOURNALISTS.

A HELICOPTER, IT WAS REPORTED, WAS TO TRY TO LAND HERE FROM SAIGON TODAY TO LIFT OUT THE JOURNALISTS AS WELL AS FORTY OTHER ADULTS AND CHILDREN.

THE SUPREME COUNCIL, WHICH COULD VERY SHORTLY LAUNCH AN APPEAL FOR AN UNCONDITIONAL CEASE-FIRE AND THE LAYING DOWN OF ARMS, IS KEEPING A BIG FORCE OF MILITARY POLICE ON HAND FOR PUBLIC ORDER PURPOSES.

THE CURFEW HERE REMAINED CLAMPED DOWN FROM 5 PM TO 5 AM.

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